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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

More about buying household textiles - particularly sheets

A dialogue between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Morse Salisbury, Radio Service, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Thursday, January 14, 1937.

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MR. SALISBURY: Welcome back to the Farm and Home Hour, Ruth. I'm sorry that your Household Calendar was squeezed out because of the opening of Congress and the shift in programs last week.

MISS VAN DEMAN: No apologies necessary at all, Morse. The Household Calendar is nothing if not adjustable. And what I planned to talk about last week is still in order today. We're still getting lots of questions about sheets and towels and blankets. The January white sales are still going on.

MR. SALISBURY: Why is it, Ruth, that these white sales, as you call 'em, always come in January - before the family budget has a chance to recover from the Christmas shocks --

MISS VAN DEMAN: The shocks? Why that's the beauty of a budget. It anticipates shocks and prepares for them --

MR. SALISBURY: Oh not for those last minute, rash purchases that the "spirit of Christmas" leads you into - the ones you hadn't counted on --

MISS VAN DEMAN: You must mean that big comfortable chair, the one you'd like to sink into when you read the evening paper - the one you suddenly decided to buy - for your wife.

MR. SALISBURY: No, no. I mean the beautiful brass candlesticks she gives me for the living room mantel. -- But you're dodging my question about the January sales on household linen.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Not intentionally, but I really don't know the answer. Maybe it's just that once the holidays are over and the new year starts, women like to go through the house and take inventory of what is on hand, and then set about getting new sheets and towels and so on, to take the place of the ones that have worn out during the year.

MR. SALISBURY: That sounds reasonable. I'll accept it as an answer until somebody gives me a better one.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Now I'm going to pick you up on that term household linen, before the National Better Business Bureau gets after you.

MR. SALISBURY: What's the matter with household linen?

MISS VAN DEMAN: How long has it been since you slept on a linen sheet?

(over)

MR. SALISBURY: Well, honestly, I don't know that I ever did. I guess they've all been cotton. But I've seen some old linen sheets. They were made out of the flax grown on my great-grandfather's farm.

MISS VAN DEMAN: That's about as close as most of us have come to linen sheets - family heirlooms. They're made of cotton nowadays. And so are many of our towels, and some of our tablecloths and napkins, either cotton or rayon.

So the textile people and the Better Business Bureaus who are in touch with the stores and the people who write advertising copy, are very careful about the way they use that word linen. They don't want the public to be fooled. So they don't call a fabric linen unless it's made of fibers of the flax plant.

MR. SALISBURY: Very well, I stand corrected. Henceforth I shall talk about household cottons.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Or why not household textiles?

MR. SALISBURY: O. K. That takes in everything - cotton, linen, rayon.

MISS VAN DEMAN: And even wool. Each one has particular properties that makes it well suited to particular purposes.

And speaking of buying the fabric to suit the purpose, the textile people have been working for years with manufacturers and others engaged in merchandizing sheets, to get a grading system or some other simple way of designating the quality of a sheet, to help women in making their selection in a store. Price isn't an accurate guide to quality. Neither is brand name.

Recently we analyzed 36 brands of bleached cotton sheets and found that they fell into five groups, on the basis of thread count, weight, and breaking strength. First came the heavyweight muslin, the kind the Government buys to use in its hospitals and institutions, where sheets have to stand very hard wear. Then came the mediumweight muslin, an all around household quality. And next the lightweight muslins, which are sometimes loaded with starch and other sizing and sold at "bargain" prices.

Then going on up the scale in the number of threads to the inch, are the fine counts, sometimes called "utility percale", and confused with the real percales. The true percales are at the top. They're the finest, softest, smoothest cotton sheets, and naturally they command the highest prices.

Now, the next step forward, as we see it, would be to have standards adopted for each of these groups, and sheets in the stores definitely marked as belonging to one or another. That would simplify shopping a lot, because most of us know what type of service we want in sheets.

Then it would simplify things further if there were a label on every sheet to tell more about thread count, and breaking strength, and so on. Some manufacturers are putting such labels on their sheets now.

And practically all are labeling them with the size - the torn size. Now there's just one thing you need to keep in mind about torn size. It means that a piece of sheeting 108 inches long, we'll say, was torn from the bolt. Then the hems were turned. So the ready-made sheet as you buy it, is not 108 inches long. It's 108 inches minus the number of inches turned over and under for the hems, which generally brings the finished sheet to about 103 inches.

Also remember that sheets shrink some each time they go into the laundry, for quite a while. We have records of so-called 108-inch sheets that shrank as much as 8 inches. In other words long before they were worn out these sheets measured only about 94 inches in length.

The 108-inche sheets cost more, but lots of people think the extra 10 cents or so is a good investment in comfort and in protection to the mattress and bed coverings, which the wide turn-over of the long sheets makes possible. And our textile people say they'd never consider buying a sheet less than 99 inches torn length. When you allow for hems and shrinkage on that you eventually come out with a sheet only 88 or so inches long.

These are just a few of the points to think about when you're buying sheets to fit your particular purpose.

MR. SALISBURY: You've got some kind of printed material that explains all about thread count, and breaking strength, and so on, haven't you? I know that is rather difficult to explain on the air.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, we have a leaflet on Quality Guides in Buying Sheets, and another on Blankets -- Quality Guides in Buying Blankets.

MR. SALISBURY: Ruth, I know that a lot of your listeners are going to want to send for those leaflets, so I'm going to ask you to repeat the titles, please.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Gladly. Quality Guides in Buying Sheets, and Quality Guides in Buying Household Blankets.

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